

1.933
D442
Op 2

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Rural Electrification Administration
Washington 25, D. C.

April 13, 1951

To : REA Field Representatives
From : Claude R. Wickard, Administrator
Subject: Action on Field Suggestions

The suggestions that you made at the field conferences in June on ways of improving our management practices have been very helpful to the Washington Staff. Your suggestions and comments have been thoughtful and significant. The REA Efficiency Awards Committee, on which each division is represented, has the responsibility for studying your suggestions and making recommendations to me as to what course of action we should follow. Each of your individual suggestions has received very careful attention and this memorandum shows the action that has been taken on suggestions made at both the Old Point Comfort (abbreviated to OPC) and the Colorado Springs (CS) conferences.

I hope that you will continue to submit suggestions at any time that will improve the efficiency of our management practices.

Group hospitalization plans (1-OPC-A&L)

A study has been made by the Personnel Division of the benefits of various hospitalization plans to field personnel. Information concerning such plans has been supplied to each field employee. If you have not already received this or if you wish additional information, you may obtain it by writing to the Personnel Division.

Per diem allowances (2-OPC-A&L; 5-CS-A&L; 3-CS-Eng.; 6-CS-A&A; 3-OPC-Mgt; and 3-CS-Mgt.)

The Travel Expense Act provides a maximum of \$9 per diem in lieu of subsistence. This does not mean that every Government worker in travel status will be authorized the maximum of \$9. It is the responsibility of each agency head to establish per diem rates which will as nearly as possible cover an employee's necessary authorized expenses for subsistence while he is traveling on official business. The established per diem rates now in effect in REA were arrived at after much study and thought. They are based largely on reports submitted by field travelers of their actual expenses during the first part of 1949, in the more densely populated areas. We have investigated per diem schedules for every bureau of the Department and find that REA is not below the average.

In order to reconsider the rates, we will need facts supporting revision. We must justify any increase to the Department of Agriculture which is concerned with the way we spend money appropriated for our administrative expenses. It is requested that those who have kept actual accounts of living expenses, while in travel status, covering at least a period of 6 months, submit reports by memorandum to their divisions.

Additional inter-divisional field conferences - (5-OPC-A&L; 10-OPC-Eng.;
3-CS-A&A; 2-CS-Mgt.)

Our present policy is to have annual inter-divisional field conferences (such as those held in June) with participation by groups of regions, and one or more interim conferences in each region.

We appreciate your suggestions for more frequent conferences because we, too, would like to get together more often in this kind of meeting.

Keeping field personnel posted on discussions with borrowers - (7-OPC-A&L;
4-OPC-Eng.)

We constantly are calling the attention of the departmental staff to the importance of keeping field employees informed of results of conferences and decisions made in Washington affecting their work and believe that substantial progress has been made in achieving this objective.

Speed up processing of travel vouchers - (9-OPC-A&L; 2 and 3-OPC-A&A;
7-CS-Mgt.)

The Travel Section is set up to clear vouchers on a 20-working day basis. This system makes the best use of auditor personnel and, taking all things into consideration, gives the best service to both the traveler and the agency.

During the fiscal year 1950, out of 3,485 vouchers audited in REA, only 7 were not cleared within the 20-working day schedule. Of the total, 81 vouchers were returned to travelers for correction. Exceptions and suspensions were required to be taken on 851 vouchers, indicating that approximately 27% of those submitted were prepared inadequately or failed to comply with Government Travel Regulations. More care by the traveler in preparing vouchers will save processing time.

We are encouraging regional heads to do everything possible to get vouchers through their offices quickly. As for staggering the procedure, there are three objections. The first is that half of our travelers would submit two vouchers for the month in which the procedure would start and also at the end of the fiscal year. Our manpower is not geared to handle this increased

workload. The second objection is that since our accounting records are maintained on a monthly basis, it would be cumbersome to separate expense items for posting in the specified month. The third objection is that in the case of two employees traveling together, both vouchers would have to be available before either could be audited. This would cause delay with some vouchers.

Selection of manager - (2-CS-A&L)

On the basis of this suggestion and the discussion at the field conferences, a revised Administrative Bulletin, Number 48, has been issued which incorporates the suggestions made at these meetings.

Reclassification of field personnel - (4-CS-A&L; 6-OPC-Fin.; 1-CS-A&A)

Positions in REA with few exceptions are allocated in accordance with provisions of the Classification Act of 1949. All allocations must conform to standards established by the Civil Service Commission. The grades of the field positions have been reviewed by our Personnel Division, the USDA Office of Personnel and the Civil Service Commission, and it is the opinion of these three groups that the field jobs are properly allocated in accordance with such standards.

We feel that the recent survey of the auditor positions, conducted by the USDA Office of Personnel and our Personnel Division, has produced very favorable results. As an outgrowth of this survey, about 35 percent of our field audit positions have been allocated to grade GS-11.

Incorporation of field ideas and suggestions in formulating policy statements - (6-CS-A&L)

We are anxious to benefit from the observations and suggestions of field personnel in formulating and reviving policy statements. As a matter of fact, many suggestions made by field employees, both at the June conferences and in reports since then, have been incorporated in new and revised policy bulletins recently issued. Any additional suggestions should be forwarded to your Division Chief, who is a member of the policy committee.

Discussion of personnel matters at Field Conferences - (1-OPC-Eng.)

The committee on arrangements has been asked to make provisions for this in planning future conferences.

Filing cabinets for field personnel - (2-OPC-Eng.; 2-OPC-Mgt.)

As a result of a suggestion made at the 1949 conferences, we have purchased 205 portable filing cabinets and are buying others when money is available.

It is our desire to make every effort to provide employees with facilities essential to the efficient conduct of their activities. Field representatives having a real need for larger cabinets are requested to inform the Administrative Services Division, through their regional heads, of individual needs. It is possible that a very limited number of such cabinets may be procured through surplus. Fieldmen should, of course, make the best possible use of their present filing cabinets by eliminating all duplication and unnecessary materials. Except for administrative bulletins and divisional memos plus some current correspondence, there is believed to be relatively little material which needs to be kept permanently in field files.

Advertisement of vacancies - (3-OPC-Eng.)

As a result of this suggestion we have revised our policy bulletin to allow field personnel 10 days to apply for job vacancies. In the event that the notice is not received in time to reply by a written application, a field employee may notify the Personnel Division of his interest in the position, stating that a formal application will follow. The need for filling vacancies promptly makes it impracticable to extend the time limit further.

Recommendations on construction - (5-OPC-Eng.; 7-CS-Eng.)

We feel that decisions with regard to method of construction must be made by the borrowers themselves. This is extremely important if they are to achieve independence and learn to manage their own affairs in accordance with our stated policy. If a board is acting in good faith and is conscientious, it is better for us to present the facts and not hand down a mandate. However, we feel that all possible information about construction costs and the advantages and disadvantages of different methods of construction should be given to the co-ops.

Request that number of specification drawings be reduced - (7-OPC-Eng.)

The suggestion that the number of new drawings be reduced has been expressed by several engineers. We are sure that Technical Standards Committee "A", on which each division concerned has a member, realizes the desirability of keeping the number of drawings to a minimum and will appreciate any specific suggestions for eliminating or consolidating drawings.

Quarterly issuance of changes in specifications - (6 and 9 OPC-Eng.)

The current practice of sending drawings and Technical Standards Committee decisions involving changes in the list of materials to field engineers, system engineers, and borrowers promptly is a result of a suggestion made at an earlier field conference. In view of past indications of the need for obtaining this information promptly, we are hesitant in changing our present practice without further comments from field engineers.

We should like to have further expressions from field engineers on these two suggestions after discussions of these matters with borrowers. Suggestions should be directed, through regional heads, to the Chief, Technical Standards Division.

Submission of new specifications to the field before approval - (8-OPC-Eng.)

There is a question of the practicability of this suggestion in view of the additional time and expense involved, particularly since all proposed drawings are reviewed by the ten regional engineers. While we recognize that the review of proposed drawings by all field engineers might be beneficial, we feel the present method of review is rather extensive and brings together the collective experience of all ten regions.

Responsibility for Selection of Conductor - (9-CS-Eng.)

This suggestion concerns REA requirements regarding the selection of conductor by borrowers. Administrative Bulletin No. 43 states that "it is the responsibility of the borrower, with the advice of its engineer, to determine the type of conductor to be used, having due regard for all conditions which affect the cost of construction, the cost of maintenance, and the operating efficiency of the system as a whole." In accordance with the provisions of this policy, REA accepts the borrowers' selection of type of conductor if the construction costs are within the limits of loan feasibility.

Competitive bids - (6-CS-Eng.)

Our present policy requires competitive bidding on all material and equipment for construction purposes that are not on the "list of materials acceptable for use on REA financed systems." However, borrowers may obtain competitive bids on material on the list if they so desire. We feel that this arrangement, like that for conductor selection, carries out our policy of encouraging borrowers to exercise more and more responsibility for the management of their own affairs.

More time for gripe sessions - (13-OPC-Eng.)

As a result of a similar suggestion made at the 1949 field conference, more time was allowed in our 1950 program for gripe sessions. The committee on arrangements for the 1951 conference will be requested to allow even more time.

Possible combination of Expense Form 1034 with Travel Form 1012 - (2-CS-Eng.)

After approximately two years, we have been successful in obtaining approval for the consolidation of these two vouchers. The 1012 voucher is being re-printed and will provide for the inclusion of small expenditures made in a

traveler's headquarters. You were advised by memorandum of October 19, 1950, from the Administrative Services Division that, pending issuance of the new form, headquarters expenses may be included on the present 1012 travel form.

Field engineers working on Power Division projects - (4-CS-Eng.)

During the early organizational stages of the Power Division there were a few requests by that division for services from the field engineers of the Engineering Division. Experience indicated that the arrangement, in instances such as referred to in the suggestion, where the field engineer was not fully familiar with the project, was unsatisfactory from the viewpoint of both the Engineering and Power Divisions. Such requests are no longer being made nor is it anticipated that they will be made in the future.

Auditor should check cost data supplied to engineer by cooperatives prior to completion of Final Documents - (5-CS-Eng.)

This suggestion is being followed wherever practicable. However, there are limitations on personnel available for this work that make it impossible to adopt this as standard practice.

Discontinuance of Group Purchase Plan - (8-CS-Eng.)

This suggestion has been referred to the committee appointed to make a study of the Group Purchase Plan. You will be notified as soon as a decision has been reached.

Replacement of typewriters furnished field personnel - (10-CS-Eng.)

For the first time in several years, we are permitted to purchase a limited number of new typewriters, and we have started a typewriter replacement program.

Room accommodations for field conferences - (11-CS-Eng.)

We realize that the accommodations for the 1950 conference were not entirely satisfactory. We have made tentative arrangements for hotel facilities for the 1951 conferences which we believe will meet with your approval.

Increase in travel mileage reimbursement - (1-OPC-A&A; 7-CS-A&A)

Under the law, an allowance of 7¢ a mile is permitted for the use of privately owned automobiles only in those instances where such use is in the best interests of and advantageous to the Government. Where a specific assignment could be handled just as well by means of common carrier and a vehicle is used on the assignment principally for the benefit of the traveler, 4¢ a mile or common carrier costs are allowed.

The request that travelers be allowed a minimum monthly allowance of \$25 cannot be granted under existing Travel Regulations established pursuant to an Act of Congress.

If travelers would be benefited from an increase in the travel advance, we could do that. The present maximum allowable travel advance of \$480 is expected to carry the average traveler 60 days. If this amount is inadequate, we are open to suggestions for change.

Women auditors - (5-OPC-A&A)

This criticism suggested that there had been possible discrimination against women auditors in making promotions.

We know of no known instance in which a woman auditor has failed to be promoted simply because she was a woman. Every applicant for promotion-from-within is considered strictly on the basis of qualifications, ability and cooperation. It is REA policy not to discriminate among job applicants. The fact that REA does employ women auditors is evidence of this. Some organizations, as a matter of policy, do not employ women as auditors.

Early mailing of informational material for conference use - (2-CS-A&A)

In the future, every effort will be made to forward informational material to be discussed at field conferences in time to permit study of the material before the meetings. In accordance with your recommendations, all bulletins, memoranda, etc., of permanent nature will be prepunched and uniform in size wherever possible.

Speed up of mail deliveries to the field - (4-CS-A&A; 4-CS-Mgt.)

In an effort to speed up mail going to the field, we have checked our entire mail routine. Division chiefs have been requested to look into different ways of speeding up the handling of mail within their divisions.

Damaged parcels - (5-CS-A&A)

As a result of this suggestion, we have initiated the practice of extra-heavy wrapping of all parcels. It would help us if field people would report all instances of damage to the parcels they receive, describing briefly its seriousness. Incidentally we are experiencing the same problem with incoming parcels. Therefore, we encourage the field people to follow the same practice of extra-heavy wrapping.

Voice recorders for field personnel - (1-OPC-Mgt., 5-CS-Mgt.)

We have purchased about 15 recorders on an experimental basis. Our experience indicates that they have not been entirely satisfactory, primarily because of the necessary rough treatment that the machines receive and also because of the problem of obtaining adequate maintenance and repair in the field. If there are instances where a fieldman cannot type or does not have access to public stenographic service, a legible long-hand report is acceptable.

During the latter part of fiscal 1950, administrative funds did not permit us to fill immediately all field requests for brief cases, filing cabinets and typewriters. Since that time requisitions for necessary equipment have been filled.

Mileage deductions on travel vouchers - (6-CS-Mgt.)

This request suggests that it is a Government practice to allow a 10 percent variation on mileage as shown on Rand McNally maps. A check reveals that this is not the case.

Classification of consumers - (6-OPC-A&L)

For purposes of accounting, the terms "farm" and "non-farm" are defined in the Accounting and Auditing Division's Uniform System of Accounts. This is taken from the U. S. Census of Agriculture for 1945 - i.e. "A farm is three acres or more, or; if less than three acres, produces agricultural products valued at \$250 or more." The 1950 census of Agriculture defines a farm as - "places of three or more acres if agricultural products, exclusive of home garden with a value of \$150 or more were produced, or, places of less than three acres only if the value of agricultural products sold amounted to \$150 or more."

In order to classify farm and non-farm consumers for revenue estimating purposes, feasibility studies, power requirement studies, etc., a revised form, "Loan Application Summary (AL-29)" includes a new consumer classification breakdown. When this form is put into use in the near future, A & L field representatives will be expected to explain to the REA borrowers the significance of the new classification and how the determination will be made. Fieldmen should caution borrowers to guard against using the consumer classification in operating reports for preparation of the AL-29 form.

Claude R. Wickard